

INCREASING FUNDING FOR STATE APPROVING AGENCIES

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, today I am introducing on behalf of Mr. EVANS, Mr. SIMPSON, Mr. REYES, Mr. FILNER, Mr. BAKER, Mr. PICKERING, Mr. SHOWS, Mr. KING, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. BALDACCIO, Ms. CARSON, Mr. REYNOLDS, and Mr. MOORE, a bill to increase funding, for State Approving Agencies (SAAs).

Some of my colleagues are familiar with the work of SAAs, but for those who are not, these vital institutions review and evaluate for approval in each state, programs of education that are offered by educational institutions under the Montgomery GI Bill and three other VA veterans' educational assistance programs. SAAs usually operate through state departments of education or postsecondary education commissions. SAAs also approve employer sponsored on-job training and apprenticeship programs, some through state departments of labor.

The need to increase funding for SAAs primarily reflects the new SAA duties in occupational licensing and credentialing and veteran, servicemember and employer outreach in each state.

In recent years, Congress has increased SAA responsibilities, most recently through enactment of Public Law 107-103, the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001. This landmark legislation increased the basic MGIB benefit by 19 percent in January 2002 to \$800 per month from \$672. It will also increase 30 percent in October 2003 and 39 percent in October 2004 when the benefit again increases to \$900 and \$985, respectively.

But as important as these enacted increases for the MGIB benefits are, our veterans will not be able to take full advantage of the improved educational opportunities unless the SAAs are given the resources necessary to certify high-quality educational programs.

From fiscal years 1995 to 2000, SAA funding was "capped"—without an annual increase—at \$13 million. In Public Law 106-419, enacted on November 1, 2000, Congress increased SAA funding to \$14 million, but only for fiscal years 2001 and 2002. If Congress does not act, in fiscal year 2003 the SAA budget reverts back to the \$13 million level. In effect, our inaction would return SAAs to the FY 1995 funding level, and they would be unable to guarantee our nation's veterans that their hard-earned MGIB benefits will be safeguarded against scam-artists and flimsy programs that seek to exploit veterans.

Indeed, since World War II Congress has relied on SAAs to ensure the quality of the education and training offered to our Nation's veterans and to protect the integrity of VA education programs popularly known as the "GI Bill." My proposal simply increases SAA annual funding from \$14 million to \$18 million, with a three percent increase the following two years, in order to provide SAAs with the resources necessary to fulfill their responsibilities.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

TRIBUTE TO OVERLAND TRAIL MIDDLE SCHOOL

HON. BOB SCHAFFER

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to rise today to congratulate the students and staff of Overland Trail Middle School of Brighton, Colorado for their work in a recent charity clothing drive. Over the course of one week, the students and parents combined to donate 850 pounds of clothing to needy residents of the town of Brighton.

This is yet another example of the schools dedication to improving the world in which we live. In the fall of 2001, the students contributed to the Twin Towers fund which was set up to support the families of uniformed service personnel lost in the September 11 tragedy. The *Fort Lupton Press* writes, "... it's nice to see area students contributing their time and money to such worthy causes around the Brighton area as well as on the East Coast."

It is an honor for the state of Colorado to have such a generous group of students, teachers, and parents. Philanthropic work is a great legacy of the United States and I am proud to see that it is being carried by citizens of all ages. On behalf of the citizens of Colorado, I ask the House to join me in extending congratulations to the students, staff and parents of Overland Trail Middle School.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE 2002 BEA CHRISTY AWARD NOMINEES

HON. MIKE ROGERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

Mr. ROGERS of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 2002 Bea Christy Award Nominees, who will be honored Friday, February 15, 2002 in Lansing, Michigan for their contributions to improve their communities and neighborhoods.

Bea Christy was a dedicated member of the Eastside Neighborhood Organization for more than ten years until her death. She also worked with other organizations to make the neighborhood and community a better place to live. She was the kind of individual who volunteered to do the "unglamorous" tasks, who worked quietly and diligently behind the scenes, who never sought recognition for her efforts.

First, she was a good neighbor in her immediate neighborhood, welcoming new people, planting flowers in the church yard across the street from her house, taking elderly folks to the doctor, and noticing where the sidewalk needed repairs. She also helped edit and deliver the Eastside Neighborhood Organization newspaper, made soup for the annual fundraiser, and helped plant flowers in the bed on Michigan Avenue.

Bea was also an active member of her church, volunteered with Radio Talking Book, as well as helped to initiate the Lansing area CROP Walk. She made these contributions in addition to being a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother.

It is quiet, committed, unsung people like Bea who make neighborhood organizations

successful, and the community as a whole a better place to live. It is in this spirit that individuals are nominated for an annual award exemplifying the qualities of Bea Christy. The following six criteria must be considered when making a nomination for the Bea Christy Award: variety of activities in your neighborhood organization; unsung nature of contributions; overall good neighbor; reliability; willingness to take on tasks; and, other service to the community.

Friday night, eleven deserving individuals will be recognized as 2002 Bea Christy Award Nominees. I salute the following nominees for their outstanding service to their communities and neighborhoods: Connie Sevrey, Association for the Bingham Community; Mia Tioli, River Point Neighborhood Association; Hannah Gardi, Neighbors United in Action; Mary Rawson, Northtown Neighborhood Association; Ernestine Merritt, Northwest Neighborhood Alliance; Alex Kruzel, Walnut Neighborhood Organization; Rick Kibbey, Eastside Neighborhood Association; Larry Karn, Old Forest Neighborhood Association; Ruth Hallman, Genesee Neighborhood Association; Thomas Foster, Eastern Neighbors; Kathie Dunbar, Sagamore Hill Neighborhood Organization.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask my colleagues to join me in paying tribute to the 2002 Bea Christy Award Nominees.

IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 1343, THE LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HATE CRIMES PREVENTION ACT

HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to declare my strong support for H.R. 1343, the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, and to urge its swift passage in the House of Representatives.

In the last five years, approximately 50,000 hate crimes were reported to authorities, with the brutal murders of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd graphically demonstrating to the nation the horrors of violence motivated by hate and bigotry. In 2000 alone, law enforcement agencies in 48 states and the District of Columbia reported 8,063 bias-motivated criminal incidents.

Unfortunately, five states have no laws against hate crimes, and the statutes in another eighteen states fall short of full protection. Even in a state such as Rhode Island, where we have strong laws against hate crimes, law enforcement officials recorded 50 cases of bias-motivated offenses in 2000. Because the current federal hate crimes law only covers crimes motivated by racial, religious or ethnic prejudice, Congress must enact legislation to establish a strong national standard for prosecuting all hate crimes.

To ensure that no American is targeted for violence based on prejudice, I am an original cosponsor of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which would provide federal assistance to state and local authorities in prosecuting hate crimes. Additionally, the legislation would expand the federal definition of hate crimes to include violent acts motivated by prejudice against the victim's sexual orientation, gender or disability.